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# PEERING THROUGH THE FOG: American Newspapers and the Easter Rising

Robert Schmuhl

NEARLY A CENTURY AFTER THE Easter Rising and its aftershocks thrust Ireland to the forefront of international attention and gave this island's struggle for independence a stiff shove, journalistic coverage of those distant days still provokes questions and provides lessons of enduring pertinence, extending far beyond one academic's obsession with the subject. This is particularly true for someone peering through the fog of time past and from afar in trying to come to terms with the events that occurred and the people who were involved during those momentous months of 1916.

Americans are often accused – with indisputable justification – of being Yankee-centric: absorbed in matters within our borders to the exclusion of the rest of the world. Curiously, this was *not* the case with the Easter Rising, prompting an observer to ask: Why was there such extensive coverage in American newspapers, and what impact did all of this press attention have on people throughout the United States?

Answering these questions involves a certain amount of scholarly speculation – or, at least, journalistic guesswork – but even tentative responses help tell a story with lasting implications for the trajectory of Irish-American and, more broadly, Anglo-Irish-American relations, as they evolved in the 20th century.

## Significant Coverage

Surveying the coverage across several US newspapers leads to the initial conclusion that editors viewed occurrences in Ireland as remarkably significant on their own and as inextricably linked to the Great War unfolding in Europe. For fourteen straight days – from 25 April through 8 May – the *New York Times* devoted front-page play to news about Ireland, with one of those days (Saturday, 29 April) featuring eight articles on page one (four of those jumped to the next page), eight more on page two, and an editorial and a commentary column tucked inside the paper. Every word of news copy on page two is about the Rising, and there are only three small ads competing for space. But the *Times* was not alone in recognising the importance of the Rising and its aftermath. Other New York newspapers, the *Washington Post*, the *Boston Globe* and the *Chicago Tribune* – not to mention Irish-American and Catholic periodicals – gave sustained prominence to events taking place in Dublin and elsewhere in Ireland.

Looking back from our vantage point, decades removed from the Rising, the seven signatories of the Proclamation cast the longest shadows. They planned the insurrection, fought for their cause, and, subsequently, were executed. For American readers in 1916, however, Roger Casement was the premier newsmaker. His ill-fated

landing and capture launched coverage on 25 April about a mysterious, German-assisted plot against the British in Ireland, and fascination with him continued until he was hanged in London on 3 August. In certain respects, the intense interest in Casement bookends US attention to the Rising and what followed. 'Sir Roger' was already well-known in America, a key fact in itself, and his personal war against the country he had served with such distinction in the foreign service to merit knighthood was a human-interest story, with both elite status and public conflict, that newspapers could not resist.

The *Boston Globe* (on 30 April) published a long profile, 'Sir Roger Casement's Astounding Career', and the *Washington Post* ran an essay by Casement on 14 May under this headline: 'England Seeking US Aid to Dominate All Europe, Says Sir Roger Casement'. The *Post* followed up with a feature on 4 June, 'Madmen Make History: Sir Roger Casement Would Have Been Immortal If He Had Succeeded'. Both the *Boston Globe* and *Chicago Tribune* came out with 'Extra' editions on 3 August to report Casement's hanging. Ten days later, the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* devoted four full pages to an American friend's reflections on – in the article's title – 'Roger Casement, Martyr'. Given the persistent conjecture about his sanity, executing Casement made Britain's reprisal seem like bloodthirsty revenge and that was much more reprehensible to Americans.

### Inaccuracies

The American journalist and author Richard Reeves offers a revision of the chestnut that news provides 'a rough first draft of history'. With the internet and other technological wonders of our current time, Reeves opines that the public increasingly receives 'the rough first draft of the first draft' (1998: 122) of history – a tentative, less than authoritative version of events that's always open to error or mistake. In a curious way and because of the circumstances of time, place and technology, that was also the situation in 1916, as American readers tried to figure out what was happening across the Atlantic in Dublin and throughout Ireland.

It is not until Sunday, 30 April (a day *after* the surrender) that the name Pearse surfaces in dispatches, and he is almost exclusively called either 'Peter' or 'J.H.' Pearce – with a 'c' rather than an 's' in the spelling of his surname. On the same day, 30 April, a page one *New York Times* headline states 'Leader Connolly Killed', an erroneous report also carried in the *Washington Post*. Four days later, on 4 May, both papers again raise the possibility of Connolly's demise, with the *Post* being definite and the *Times* inserting the qualifier 'Probably' in its headline. In addition, the *Boston Globe* and the *World* in New York were definite in claiming on their front pages that 'Four Irish Uprising Leaders' (in the phrase of the headline in the *World*) had been shot during the first round of executions.

To its credit, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that Connolly had *not* been executed; however, immediately after this clarification, it is noted that 'three other signatories of the Irish proclamation have been found guilty and sentenced to three years' imprisonment. Their names follow in boldface type:

**Edmund W. Duggan.**

**Pierce Beazlaw.**

**Joseph Maginnis.**

These men, of course, did not sign the Proclamation – all who did were executed – but Edward (not Edmund) Duggan, Pierce Beasley (not Beazlaw), and Joseph Maguinness (spelled differently from what the *Tribune* reported) did receive ‘three years’ penal servitude’. But a more whopping inaccuracy follows in the next paragraph. The article explains that Roger Casement’s trial will begin shortly and that:

Casement is confined in a cell in the Tower [of London], not far from the scene at which the firing squads snuffed out the lives of the four rebel leaders who eight days ago had raised the curtain of revolution.

In that single sentence, the location of the first executions is wrong, Connolly is now counted as one of the executed, and the days since the initial Rising are two short of what is correct.

Pointing out such factual mistakes might prompt some retrospective sniggering, but it also raises a more serious cautionary flag about the necessity for scepticism in evaluating breaking news. In this circumstance, American newspapers were dealing with dispatches almost exclusively filed from London about Ireland at a time when information from the scene was difficult to obtain and subject to wartime censorship. Indeed, several U.S. papers published this identical paragraph from a wire-service dispatch on 28 April to illustrate the problems in collecting basic information:

Dublin is further from London today than Peking is from New York, so far as communication for the general public is concerned. No Irish newspapers have reached here [London] since the rising, and passenger traffic has been for the most part suspended. The only information comes through official channels.

Irish newspapers, of course, weren’t readily available. The *Irish Times* missed two days (28 and 29 April), the *Independent* seven days (26 April until 4 May), and the *Freeman’s Journal* ten days (25 April until 5 May). The British origin of much of the coverage – many articles appearing in the U.S. came directly from London newspapers, and it wasn’t until 29 April that any dispatch carried a Dublin dateline – meant that certain imperial biases made their way across the Atlantic, slanting the reports. Repeatedly the rebels are referred to as ‘Sinn Feiners’ engaged in a ‘Sinn Fein Revolt’ that lacked the support of Irish people at large.

### Providing Context

Despite a pro-British tilt and the difficulties in gathering verifiable facts with the resultant errors we now identify, the American newspapers provided greater context for understanding the Rising and its meaning than an analyst today might anticipate. For instance, on two successive weeks, the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* devoted lengthy features to (in the titles of the articles) ‘Ireland’s Sudden Revolt’ (30 April) and ‘Poets Marched in the Van of Irish Revolt’ (7 May). The first story is a balanced backgrounder that relies on the perspectives of prominent Irish-Americans to explain why the Rising occurred as well as the thinking behind ‘Redmond sympathizers’ and ‘the Sinn Féiners’. The second one, contributed by poet Joyce Kilmer, who was on the staff of the *Sunday Magazine*, establishes early on the Irish literary

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dimension to what had just happened. A few sentences from the opening offer a viewpoint rich in the romance of word-inspired adventure that also evokes sympathy:

A poetic revolution – indeed, a poets’ revolution – that is what has been happening in Ireland during the last two weeks, says Padraic Colum, himself an Irish poet, now in New York. The sudden rise and fall of the Irish Republic, the event which has made Dublin crowd Verdun off the front pages of the newspapers, was peculiarly literary in character ...

The report goes on – with much quoting of Colum, who personally knew many of the leaders – and quickly we find this sentence:

The leaders of the revolutionary forces were almost without exception men of literary tastes and training, who went into battle, as one of the dispatches phrased it, ‘with a revolver in one hand and a copy of Sophocles in the other.’

Very Irish, to be sure.

Interestingly, Kilmer, who was killed fighting in France during the summer of 1918, was remembered by one friend, Robert Cortes Holliday, as ‘a much more ardent Irishman than many an Irishman born’ (1918: 18). His own poetry was not immune to revolutionary influence, and he was inspired to compose his poem, ‘Easter Week’, collected in *Main Street and Other Poems*, to commemorate the Rising. Instead of *mano-a-mano*, the first stanza (1917: 66) goes poet-a-poet:

‘Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone  
It’s with O’Leary in the grave.’  
Then, Yeats, what gave that Easter dawn  
A hue so radiantly brave?

The poem closes with these lines:

Romantic Ireland is not old.  
For years untold her youth will shine.  
Her heart is fed on Heavenly bread,  
The blood of martyrs is her wine. (1917: 67)

### Editorial Shelling

Notwithstanding the extensive news and feature coverage that presented the thinking of all parties, the *New York Times* on its editorial page was for the most part anti-rebel, even anti-Irish. An editorial of 29 April begins: ‘Ireland in a state of rebellion is Irish. Never was it otherwise.’ Later, this sentence appears: ‘Rebellion has been the chronic, almost to say the natural, condition of Ireland, being now and then only a little more acute than usual.’ The final paragraph ends with a flourish:

Never has Ireland been free, and yet she has all the more passion for freedom. What these present rebels want is not to be free of England. They pursue an ideal of freedom. England is the symbol of restraint. If it were not England, it

might be a King. If it were not a King, it might be fairies that go about in Ireland, assuming fantastic shapes, to frighten people and make them do all the things they do not want to do.

On 2 May, editorial shelling from the *Times* continues under the heading 'The Irish Folly'. The lead of this blast is direct: 'The Irish revolt in Dublin is soon ended. It was utterly mistaken, it has had only evil fruits.' This time fairies don't frolic at the conclusion. The editorial takes on Irish-American supporters in no uncertain terms in one 108-word sentence:

The leaders of the movement cannot be acquitted of responsibility, they are altogether blameworthy, but a sterner censure even may justly be visited upon those in this country who have encouraged them and now commend their acts of incredible folly and rashness, for when any man of the Irish race in America speaks in praise of the deplorable Sinn Fein escapade it is hard to shut out the belief that a seeking for popularity here and a political motive purely domestic, rather than sincere sympathy with the Irish 'cause' or hope for its success, have been the real prompting to such aid and comfort as has been given.

Two days after this editorial appeared, another one in the *Times* of 4 May, titled 'Fate of the Irish Rebels', endorsed the first executions, noting

war is a stern business and the subject who sets himself against his King or the citizen who rises against his Government when the nation is straining every resource to overcome enemies in the field can hardly expect mercy.

But the times themselves and specific events can alter any perspective. On page one of the *Times* for 12 May, a dispatch with a London dateline begins:

The most dangerous factor in Ireland's situation which had been recognized since the brief rising flashed in the pan was that the punishment of the rebels would cause a reaction of sympathy among the warm-hearted and emotional people. This threatening danger appears to be fast materializing.

A shifting of opinion (at least to a modest degree) is detectable even on the paper's editorial page that same day. Under the heading 'Irish Rebels', we read: 'Fourteen persons have been executed, two or three apparently sacrificed to official stupidity. But the whole proceeding is incredibly stupid' and

unworthy of England. Leave that sort of thing to Germany. No matter if these misguided rebels, intellectuals, and miscellaneous poor devils and scalawags were suborned and abetted by Germany. Only an Irish madman would look for help to the Prussian drill sergeants.

In the last paragraph, *The Times* regains its traditional moorings by complimenting 'the noble, generous British' and the 'Irish patriotism of John Redmond'.

How the *New York Times* handled the Easter Rising and what followed illustrates the policy of that paper in trying to keep news and editorials separate, with a wall between these distinct types of journalism. The New York Public Library is currently cataloguing the archives of the New York Times Company Records, and the papers of publisher Adolph S. Ochs are among the first files available to the public. Ochs, who bought the *Times* in 1896 and introduced the slogan ‘All the News That’s Fit to Print’ that year, was considerably more passionate about delivering news than taking a stand – and he even considered doing away with the editorial page from ‘fear that editorial crusading might inspire news reporters to slant stories to conform with the crusading’ (Berger, 1951: 528).

Early in the first World War, the publisher received a letter condemning the *Times* for being anti-German, with the reader cancelling his subscription. Ochs responded (box 120, folder 13) on 26 August 1914:

The *Times* is much more free from unfairness, even with the shortcomings arising in a time of extraordinary excitement and confusion, than you are free from prejudice, for you are most unfair in your criticism. The *Times* undertakes to secure the news from every source available, and to present it without prejudice. Doubtless The *Times* has often received extravagant and perhaps untrue reports from English and French sources, but this has been true also of the little news that has been available from German sources. The *Times* does not attempt to alter the news to conform to its sympathies or to gain favor with its readers.

A few days after Ochs wrote this news-above-all letter, he received a memo on 4 September 1914, saying the recipient had contacted the circulation department to cancel the cancellation of his subscription. He had decided to give the paper another chance.

Other American newspapers, however, did not share the editorial ‘sympathies’ of the *Times* about the Irish situation. In fact, on 2 May, a day *before* the first executions, both the *Washington Post* and *Chicago Tribune* published editorials dealing directly with the prospect of British punishment going too far. In its opening sentences, the *Post* finds fault with the Rising and a specific participant:

The latest Irish rebellion collapses even sooner than was expected. It was poorly organized and poorly executed. It relied upon Sir Roger Casement, a harebrained if not insane agitator whose only successful stroke was the enlisting of German assistance. Why the German government or people lent any aid to Sir Roger is not apparent, since the Germans are not usually addicted to wild-geese chases.

A few sentences later, the editorial takes a pronounced turn, complete with an element of prescience:

The uprising, abortive as it proved to be, is nevertheless a reminder that the Irish question remains to be settled. Ireland must have a greater measure of home rule. If the British government has not entirely lost its balance, it will

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not make fierce reprisals in Ireland, but will deal tolerantly even with the ring-leaders of the insurrection. . . . History is too full of instances of brutal and excessive measures by England in dealing with Ireland, and it ought to serve as a warning against such a policy now.

In its editorial, the *Chicago Tribune* follows a similar course. The first sentence is judgmental, though not dismissively so, as we see in the *Post*:

The collapse of the Irish rebellion reveals the romantic futility of its beginning. Passionate men without proper equipment undertook to throw off English rule at the very time when Great Britain, for the first time in its history, has a great army, now well trained.

The ending offers advice rather than ‘a warning’, but the point is the same:

There is a hint that this now subdued Irish rebellion will not be followed by many executions to give a new set of memories to the Irish. It would be a wise England that saw the Irish revolt compassionately.

Three days later – after Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh and Tom Clarke had been executed – the *Tribune* returns on its editorial page to the British reaction in dealing with the rebels. Under the heading ‘Unnecessary and Inexpedient’, the paper asserts: ‘... execution was precisely the way not to rid Ireland of rebels. The men executed were the best possible material out of which to make martyrs.’ The *Tribune* goes so far as to propose an alternative approach:

It might have been far more effective to turn the three men loose in Dublin. Their heroism would have oozed away a little every time a citizen looked at the wrecked postoffice. The practical result of their fury would have established them in the mind of the comfortable, practical citizens as wild dreamers.

These editorials deserve sustained attention because they show competing viewpoints then taking shape for readers of American newspapers. The Rising might have been brief, disorganized, and, ultimately, unsuccessful, but the British response merited stern criticism of its own. In other words, the action and the reaction were judged simultaneously with the evaluation of the reaction proving more influential – as the headlines turned into history. The ‘wild dreamers’ did, indeed, become ‘martyrs’, and during that transformation American public opinion changed to the benefit of the rebels and their cause. As Jay P. Dolan writes,

[The British] turned a military victory into a political debacle by executing the leaders of the rebellion ... The executions turned the tide of public opinion against the British, ushering in a decisive chapter in Ireland’s century-long struggle to gain freedom from British rule (Dolan, 2008: 201).

### **Irish America**

Throughout the nineteen days encompassing the Rising and the executions, news about Ireland made the front page of the *New York Times* seventeen days, the *Boston*



*Globe* sixteen, the *Washington Post* thirteen, and the *Chicago Tribune* and the *World* (of New York) eleven. With other stories and features inside, along with editorials and columns of commentary, the US press provided comprehensive coverage of what was happening in Ireland. It was as though the European war (about which America was publicly neutral) had another front – and this one that came out-of-the-blue had a significant number of blood ties. At the time, an estimated one-fifth of the population in the States – approximately 20 million people – were Irish by background, with many living in the cities of New York, Boston and Chicago.

As a result of this demographic reality, some of the coverage focuses on the response of Irish America to everything occurring on this island. This means that dispatches originating from either London or Dublin were subject to censorship, but that reportage from interviews or meetings across the Atlantic could – and did – include full-throated statements favouring Irish independence from people in America. You see this to a degree in late April and early May – the already mentioned features in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* are good illustrations – but there is even more localised attention as sympathy grew within the Irish-American communities. On 15 May (three days after the last executions in Dublin), the *Times* puts this headline on its front page: ‘Irish Pay Tribute to Dublin Rebels/Throng at Carnegie Hall Memorializes Them as Martyrs of Race’.

Here is the lead of that story:

Thirty-five hundred Irish men and women gathered in Carnegie Hall last night to honor the memory of the fifteen Irishmen put to death by the English government after the Dublin uprising. They adopted resolutions demanding that there be no settlement of the European war which did not include a plan for the freedom of Ireland.

The report goes on to say that 4,000 people couldn’t get into the hall and ‘Cheering consumed more of the time than did speechmaking.’

This situation – a free press going about its work – did not escape the attention of the British. On 1 June, General Sir John Maxwell, commander-in-chief of military forces here, established a Press Censor’s office in Dublin, and on 5 June the Censor, Lieutenant-Colonel Lord Decies, issued a directive, with the word CONFIDENTIAL in capital letters and underlined at the top, to every newspaper in Ireland.

The document is included in the ‘Press Censorship Records 1916-1919’ in the National Archives (box 3, folder 128), and it is specific, especially in warning about the re-publication of certain journalistic reports:

You are requested to give careful consideration to the following before publication:

1. Resolutions and speeches of Corporations, County and Urban Councils and Boards of Guardians.
2. Letters from soldiers, connected with the late rising in Dublin.
3. Extracts from American newspapers, or private letters sent you from individuals received from America.

4. Criticisms in the form of letters from individuals on the late rising in Dublin, of a violent nature.
5. Letters sent you from men arrested in Dublin in connection with the late rising now in detention.
6. Indiscretions made by other papers either in Foreign or Home Press should not be published.

No objection will be taken to any publication of above provided the language is moderate; doubtful matter should be submitted before printing.

Despite this edict, borders between Ireland and America proved porous. The *Gaelic American* even acquired a copy of this directive and published it in a special box on 8 July 1916, with an editorial comment as a headline: 'How the Irish Press is Gagged'.

Indeed, a couple months later, the *Roscommon Herald* provided an engrossing, you-are-there article from the *New York Times Magazine*. In the US, the article, which was published on 20 August 1916, carried the headline 'Irish Girl Rebel Tells of Dublin Fighting', and recounted the story of Moira Regan, who served in the GPO and then moved to live in America. Though mostly direct quotation, Joyce Kilmer received the byline.

In the *Roscommon Herald*, the editor tried to defuse the explosive nature of the article by burying it on page five with a one-column headline, 'Tales of the Rebellion', and by saying, 'The New York Times, a strong pro-Ally paper, prints the following ...' However, the Censor did notice, firing off this warning, which is included in the Press Censorship Records (box 1, folder 30) and dated 20 September 1916:

I am directed to inform you that the publication of your article 'Tales of the Rebellion' purporting to be taken from the 'New York Times' and appearing in your issue of 16th September is in contravention of the Defence of the Realm regulations, and I am further instructed to warn you that the publication of Press matter of this description renders your paper liable to suppression under the Defence of the Realm Act. You are advised in future to submit articles of this nature to the Press Censor before publication.

### The Gaelic American

Although what we now call the 'mainstream' press offered a variety of perspectives in explaining the Rising and its aftermath, other journalistic outlets made no attempt to be either fair or balanced in reporting about or commenting on events in Ireland. The *Gaelic American*, a weekly with a national circulation of 28,000, flew the flag of Irish republicanism in every issue it printed. This is probably to be expected because the editor of the *Gaelic American* was John Devoy, a tireless figure for many decades in the cause of an independent Ireland. In fact, Kevin Kenny asserts: 'It was largely through Devoy's fund-raising and organizational efforts in the United States that the Easter rebellion of 1916 became possible' (2000: 173).

The coverage in the *Gaelic American* still makes for fascinating reading today, and what is distinctive is the breadth of its treatment. As late as 29 July 1916, there's a detailed, eyewitness report, 'Inside History of the Easter Week Rebellion', complete with what's called an 'Insurrection Map of the City of Dublin'. The third paragraph

begins: 'The whole inside story cannot be published at present, but enough can be made public to clear up the situation for the benefit of Nationalists in America.' Succeding issues provide amplification with great specificity: 'James Connolly Butchered While Wounded' (12 August 1916), 'Graphic Story of the Battle of Ashbourne' (23 September 1916), 'Widow's Own Story of Skeffington's Murder' (30 December 1916). Especially for the *Gaelic American*, the Easter Rising represented the springboard to accomplish the most desired objective, becoming a news story without a conclusion.

Besides chronicling the heroism of the rebels and their cause, the *Gaelic American* frequently offers press criticism directed at the coverage by large U.S. dailies. In the 20 May 1916 issue, along with a lengthy article, 'Facts of the Rebellion Begin to Arrive' (as though whatever facts previously reported in other outlets were not reliable), there is a story about Casement's preliminary hearing on the charge of High Treason. One paragraph provides the newspaper's point of view:

It was a highly sensational case, and, as might be expected, the New York papers reveled in the details, some of which were clearly invented, either in London or here. All of the cabled reports and the headlines were hostile to the prisoner except those of the *American*, the *Evening Journal*, and the *Evening Mail*, but the *Sun's* correspondent was the meanest liar among them. He confessed himself a pimp, described how he looked over Sir Roger's shoulder to spy on the notes he was taking, and lied like a cur about his 'nervousness' and 'perturbation', which the other correspondents denied. Of course this fellow is an Englishman. But, whatever his nationality, he is a dirty skunk.

Devoy rarely missed the chance to take a punch at other journalistic organisations, with the *New York Times* a favorite target. One article, published 5 August, carries this headline, 'Lying for England,' and begins: 'The *New York Times*, which, in its European news, is an echo of its London namesake and loses no opportunity of presenting the English side of every case.' The *Gaelic American* then reprints a dispatch from the *London Times* that the *New York Times* had also published – with the sole purpose of showing the gross inaccuracies and biases on display for less devout readers.

Devoy, called by Pearse 'the greatest of the Fenians' (Dooley, 2003: 1), wrote and edited with his own definite stance and bias. Never addressed, of course, is the matter of professional propriety – his direct involvement in the Rising that he unceasingly celebrated in the pages of the *Gaelic American*. In a certain sense, he was both a leading actor in the drama and a most-approving reviewer of the performance. A consideration of journalistic ethics didn't cloud his mind or seem to be the concern it might be today.

### A Major Story

Historical hindsight might dilate on the chaos, confusion, not to mention countermand, of the Rising. Though W.B. Yeats could discern the birth of a 'terrible beauty' in his poem 'Easter, 1916', Michael Collins wrote in a letter a more hard-headed assessment: 'On the whole I think the Rising was bungled terribly, costing many a good life' (Coogan, 2002: 54). Either judgment, though, comes after the dust has settled and the embers have cooled.

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What's more germane in examining American press coverage is that US newspapers had no idea how events would play out, so they had to try to keep up with the information as it became available. That in itself wasn't easy, given the restrictions on reporting, the problems with trans-Atlantic cable communication, and everything else. The *World* at one point even sought the opinion of George Bernard Shaw, who wired back on 4 May these words: 'Silly, ignorant, wrong-headed – but honorable, brave and republican' – an assessment that received extensive usage.

The Rising became a major and continuing story in the U.S. for several reasons. Its militaristic adventurism intersected with other war news from Europe at the same time Britain was under Zeppelin and U-boat attacks from the Germans. Though officially neutral – Woodrow Wilson's re-election slogan in his presidential campaign of 1916 was 'He kept us out of war' – a large percentage of Americans supported England and its allies against Germany – and, at the time, England was on its back foot.

A second reason is that the Rising, though taking place thousands of miles away, had a strong local dimension for several large newspapers. It wasn't just the case of first-, second-, or third-generation Irish-Americans being readers of the big-city press. Across the country, Irish-American groups and clubs conducted meetings to support the rebels and to offer humanitarian assistance. The 'exiled children in America' (in the phrase of the Proclamation) wanted to know the fate of relatives and what the future of Ireland might be.

A third, related reason is that news about Ireland and the Irish wasn't exactly foreign to those who followed the American press. An Irish race convention had taken place in New York in March of 1916. This convention, which drew 2,300 delegates from all over the U.S., led to the creation of the Friends of Irish Freedom and to a considerable amount of press coverage (Doorley, 2005: 36). In addition, during the following month, on two consecutive Sundays before Easter, the largest New York newspapers devoted major features to Irish issues. The lead offering of the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* on 9 April was George Bernard Shaw's controversial essay on what the title called 'Irish Nonsense about Ireland', and a week later the *World* published 'The Heroism and Gallantry of the Fighting Irish: Told by John Redmond, Nationalist Leader'. This extended interview, conducted by James M. Tuohy, was filed from London and placed atop the 'Editorial Section', complete with a line drawing of Redmond. At the time, according to *N.W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual & Directory*, the circulation of the *World* was 519,269 on Sunday (1917: 676) and that of the *Times* was 340,904 (1917: 673).

News of the Rising hit with hurricane force, but it wasn't as though Americans were clueless about matters in Ireland prior to Easter week of 1916. Once the Rising itself ended, the coverage of the executions, Casement's trial, and his hanging kept the Irish Question at the forefront of American thinking. In certain respects, the story's continuity kept it alive – as you see, for instance, with the *New York Times*. Its *Sunday Magazine* alone ran major articles on 6 August ('The Plight of Home Rule'), 13 August ('Roger Casement, Martyr'), 20 August ('Irish Girl Rebel Tells of Dublin Fighting'), 24 September ('American Sentiment and American Apathy'), 8 October ('Irish Leaders Fall Out Over Home Rule Fiasco'), and on 26 November ('Bernard Shaw's Solution of Ireland's Troubles').

Though it falls beyond the scope of this paper, a 427-page book, with the title *The Irish Rebellion of 1916 and Its Martyrs: Erin's Tragic Easter*, appeared later that

year from New York publisher Devin-Adair and prompted press coverage on its own. The work of eight authors and edited by Maurice Joy, this volume presents historical background, the report of the Royal Commission, and hagiographic profiles of key participants. What is known today as an instant book, the publication reflects the thinking that at least in some American quarters the Rising and everything it represented deserved more lasting attention than the treatment in daily papers. More significantly, something of continuing consequence was taking shape, both in Ireland and in the United States.

However, it is clear that the American press did play a crucial role in enlightening reader-citizens about the broader struggle for Irish freedom. Repeatedly in the coverage there are comparisons of the Rising to the Boston Tea Party or to the Battle of Lexington, and of Pearse to George Washington, Casement to Benjamin Franklin – and Redmond to Benedict Arnold, the most-reviled traitor to America in the American Revolution. Echoes of US history could be heard from afar, and they had impact.

Journalistic problems presented themselves with regularity, but the bigger picture emerged with considerable clarity as time passed and more facts became known. This is particularly true in the case of the *New York Times* in its ambition to be recognised as the nation's newspaper of record. The sheer volume of its coverage of what was happening in Ireland and Europe in general is noteworthy, but so, too, is its variety and seriousness. The newspaper met the historic moment at a critical phase in its evolution – and, subsequently, won the first ever Pulitzer Prize for Public Service for publishing so many documents, speeches, and reports 'relating to the progress and conduct of the war'. The award was made in 1918 for previous coverage.

The *Times*, though, was by no means alone. Dispatches from and about Ireland became a staple of the stateside news diet and, over time, fortified with this information, support from the New World helped sustain the cause of Irish independence. Governmentally, the Wilson Administration assiduously avoided the issue, with John Devoy in his memoirs branding Wilson 'the meanest and most malignant man who ever filled the office of President of the United States' (1929: 470).

But the people, on their own, did what they could. They quickly created the 'Irish Relief Fund' and collected between \$100,000 and \$150,000 in humanitarian aid (Doorley, 2005: 52). Before Wilson departed the White House, the 'Irish Victory Fund', flush with \$1 million, established the American Commission on Irish Independence (Doorley, 2005: 92). During the War of Independence, the American Committee for Relief in Ireland sent over another \$5 million in assistance to the Irish White Cross (Tansill, 1957: 415), and the American Commission on Conditions in Ireland, composed of prominent Americans (many without links to Irish America), conducted hearings and published a massive, brutally candid report. In part, the people acted because they were informed. That knowledge, in no small measure, arrived steadily – often through the fog – in the words and pictures that were published in American newspapers after the first shots of the Rising were fired.

## AUTHOR

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